

Consensus

Volume 18

Issue 1 *Issues in Church Life*

Article 23

5-1-1992

The Teaching Minister

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Recommended Citation

Weigel, Arnold D. (1992) "The Teaching Minister," *Consensus*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 23.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol18/iss1/23>

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as a paradigm of discipleship (if that is what is meant) was less than effective. "What If...?" is a startling reversal of Jesus' determination "to go to Jerusalem": Peter, in spite of Jesus' rebuke, persuades him *not* to go! "The Fastest Gun in The West" is an allegory about messianic expectations. "Who is the Least?" is also an allegory, though very closely tied to the parable of the last judgment. Though somewhat abstract, it is powerfully moving and cause for honest self-examination. In "Michal" David's wife tells her story of life with David and of how her jealousy has cost her everything. The sermon seems a bit contrived, yet a youth retreat setting may prove a useful setting for this retelling of the biblical narrative. In "The Godless Agreement" Moses' public relations man remonstrates about Moses' invisible God and how difficult this God will be to "sell". It is a refreshing and poignant approach to the first commandment—and very challenging! Cain ("Cain's Story") tells how he finally came to accept his "mark" as a sign of God's mercy and love. And in "The Day Jesus Came to the City" several persons, including the donkey, share their experience of Palm Sunday; some of the endings get a bit mushy, and one feels the need to get beyond the characters.

These story-sermons are the product of an imaginative mind. They are examples of several ways to shape the plots of such sermons, and motivate one to attempt such preaching. Above all, they demonstrate nicely the contrast between right-brain and left-brain preaching.

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The Teaching Minister

Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen
Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991
138 pp.

Two teachers at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, namely, Clark M. Williamson, Professor of Theology, and Ronald J. Allen, Assistant Professor of Preaching, have co-authored a provocative, searching and challenging text which incorporates insightful sociological, theological and pastoral scholarship.

In response to a set of critical questions facing the church today: "What should be the image, model or role of the clergy? How should Christian pastors understand what the church properly expects and needs from them? What is the central task of the ministry?" (7), the authors state plainly and emphatically: "The *central* task of ministry is *teaching* the Christian faith" (7).

To emphasize this centrality of teaching is simultaneously a matter of pastoral identity ("As pastor, I am a teacher!") and of pastoral practice ("As pastor, I do teaching!"). "Teaching means *theological* education in the church" (14). The authors contend that many of the problems facing mainline Protestant churches, such as decline in membership, lack of vibrancy—especially in worship and in education—secularization from within, are largely the result of the neglect of the teaching office and the teaching task-fulfillment by the clergy. They argue, supported by views put forward from selected sociologists and theologians of note, that the chief failure of the mainline churches "is an educational failure: a failure to transmit the meaning and excitement of Christianity from one generation to another" (25).

The first half of the book sets forth the authors' thesis with precision and clarity. Embedded in their material is a style which engages the reader in a self-examining and challenging manner. They demonstrate that the teaching of the faith has always been central "in the history and literature of biblical Israel, in the practice and writings of the earliest churches as recorded in the scriptures, and throughout the history of the church until recently" (9). They claim that it is urgent for the church, especially the clergy, to recover and to reclaim the office and the essential practice of teaching.

The latter half of the book explores concrete avenues and expressions of such recovery and reclamation. Covered in this portion of the book is what the authors call "a nuts-and-bolts approach"—in which theology and practice, tradition and contemporaneity, content and context enter into dialogue with one another, inform one another and lead to creative understandings and constructive actions. Within these chapters is a strong emphasis on fulfilling the teaching ministry in all dimensions of parish ministry, but especially so through preaching. They identify "the sermon as teaching event" (83). The concluding chapter states that "ministers teach in everything they do, and that the church itself teaches both in the manner in which it conducts its internal life and in its witness in the larger community" (105).

The congregation is identified as "a neighborhood theological seminary whose primary purpose is to help its members relate the Christian tradition appropriately, intelligently, and morally to the contemporary world situation and vice versa" (106).

In all this ministry, the pastor is a central person. The authors speak of the pastor as "the teacher who helps the congregation articulate its vision and translate that vision into day-to-day life. Along the way, the minister is sensitive to those moments in the process that can become teaching moments" (118).

This book will be of interest and assistance to parish clergy, especially those who wish to grow in their sensitivity to grasping "teaching moments", to seminarians, to professors of Christian education, to laity—particularly those concerned about renewal of the church through educational ministries.

This book could be a valuable companion to *A Teachable Spirit* (Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church) by Richard R. Osmer (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). Osmer analyzes the shortcomings and pitfalls of rampant individualism and of rigid authoritarianism in dealing with the contemporary malaise of Protestant mainline churches.

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Preaching in the Patristic Age: Studies in Honor of Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.

David G. Hunter, editor
New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989
vi + 217 pp.

Here is a truly fine volume serving the interests of both students of Patristics and students of the history of preaching! On the occasion of his 75th birthday, Burghardt is honored as scholar of Patristics and preacher of note in a series of essays devoted most adeptly to an examination of preaching in the Patristic age.

An opening "Appreciation" by Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J., presents portraits of Burghardt as man, theologian, teacher and preacher. In the scholarly world Burghardt is best known for his editorship of the journal *Theological Studies*, his intense involvement in Vatican II and the turmoil in American Roman Catholicism prior to and after that landmark, and his long and appreciative work in the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues. In the homiletical world he is deeply respected for his several volumes of homilies and the primer, *Preaching: The Art and the Craft* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). He taught at Woodstock College, Maryland and at Georgetown University.

The individual essays are all of high quality, though of course some are more gripping than others. "Preaching in the Apostolic and Subapostolic Age" by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. explores St. Paul's awareness of his apostolic preaching and the Lucan portraits of apostolic preachers and draws some comparisons. "Origen as Homilist" by Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J. is one of the best essays. Origen is the first Christian biblical scholar and homilist, and his homilies "give us a clear and fascinating picture of biblical preaching in the third century" (36). He set the pace and style of preaching as being liturgical ("it belonged in the order of Christian worship"), exegetical (it explained a text), and prophetic ("it demonstrated the significance of the text for the hearers") (37). Lienhard examines each of these elements as well as Origen's personal preaching style, and draws some striking comparisons to contemporary preaching.